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Costa Rica

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Official Name: Republic of Costa Rica

PROFILE

People

Nationality: *Noun and adjective*—Costa Rican(s). **Population** (1985): 2.6 million. **Annual growth rate** (1985): 2.6%. **Density:** 51.0/sq. km. (132.0/sq. mi.). **Ethnic groups:** white (including a few mestizos) 96%, black 3%, Indian 1%. **Religion:** 95% Roman Catholic. **Language:** Spanish, with Jamaican dialect of English spoken around Puerto Limon. **Education:** *Years compulsory*—6. *Attendance*—nearly 100%. *Literacy*—90%. **Health:** *Infant mortality rate*—15.2/1,000. *Life expectancy*—men 67.5 yrs., women 71.9 yrs. **Work force** (853,000, 1985 est.): *Agriculture*—32.6%. *Industry and commerce*—40.4%. *Services and government*—25%. *Other*—2%.

Geography

Area: 51,022 sq. km. (19,700 sq. mi.), slightly smaller than W. Virginia. **Cities:** *Capital*—San Jose (metropolitan pop. 800,000). *Other cities*—Alajuela (41,000), Cartago (40,000). **Terrain:** A rugged, central massif runs the length of the country separating coastal plains. **Climate:** Tropical and semitropical.

Government

Type: Democratic republic. **Independence:** September 15, 1821. **Constitution:** November 9, 1949.

Branches: *Executive*—president (head of government and chief of state) elected for a single 4-yr. term, two vice presidents, Cabinet (16 ministers). *Legislative*—57-deputy unicameral Legislative Assembly elected at 4-yr. intervals. *Judicial*—Supreme Court of Justice (17 magistrates elected by Legislative Assembly at 8-yr. intervals).

Subdivisions: Seven provinces divided into 80 cantons as well as districts.

Political parties: Social Christian Unity Party (PUSC), National Liberation Party (PLN), Popular Vanguard Party (PVP), Costa Rican Peoples Party (PPC), Movement of the New Republic (MNR), Costa Rican Socialist Party (PSC). **Suffrage:** Obligatory over age 18.

Central government budget (1985): $603.9 million.

Defense (Ministry of Public Security): 0.9% of est. 1985 GDP.

Holiday: Independence Day, September 15.

Flag: Two blue horizontal stripes top and bottom, two white inner stripes, and a wide, red center band with the national coat of arms.

Economy

GDP (1985): $3.71 billion. **Annual real growth rate** (1985): 2.2%. **Per capita income** (1985): $1,352. **Inflation** (1985 wholesale prices): 15%.

Natural resource: Hydroelectric power.

Agriculture (19.6% of GDP): *Products*—bananas, coffee, beef, sugarcane, grain.

Industry (21% of GDP) *Types*—food processing, textiles and clothing, construction materials, fertilizer.

Trade (1985): *Exports*—$928 million: coffee, bananas, beef, sugar, cocoa. *Major markets*—US 53%, CACM 14%, FRG 9%. *Imports*—$1,037 million: manufactured goods, machinery, transportation equipment, chemicals, fuel, foodstuffs, fertilizer. *Major suppliers*—US 40%, CACM 10%, Japan 8%.

Exchange rates: *Official rate*—20 colones = US$1. *Market rate*—54.40 = US$1 (April 1986).

Fiscal year: Calendar year.

US economic aid received (1985): $195 million.

Debt service charges as % of exports: 60% in 1985; 1986 debt service schedule is under discussion with creditors.

Membership in International Organizations

UN and some of its specialized and related agencies, including the World Bank, FAO, IAEA, ICAO, IDA, WMO, ILO, IPU, ITU, WHO; Organization of American States (OAS), Central American Common Market (CACM), Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), International Wheat Council (IWC), Latin American Economic System (SELA).

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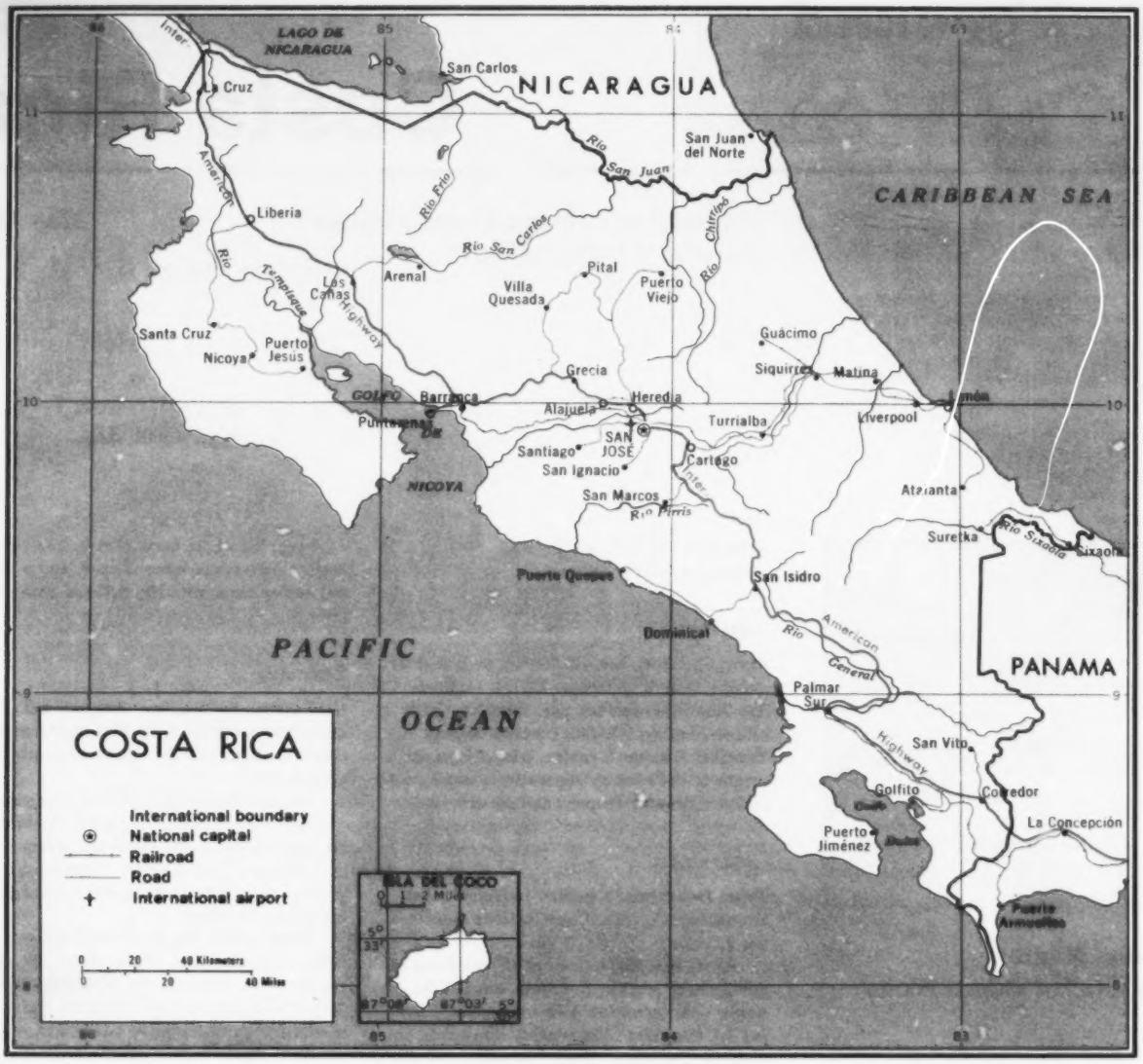


GEOGRAPHY

Located in a narrow strip between Panama and Nicaragua, Costa Rica is the second smallest Central American country. The terrain is mostly rugged mountains and hills cut by many streams and rivers. About two-thirds of the country is forested. A relatively wide coastal plain in the east is mirrored by a narrower plain on the Pacific coast. Three volcanic mountain ranges extend the length of the country, with elevations in the southern Talamanca Range reaching 4,000 meters (13,000 ft.) above sea level.

The tropical location, warm offshore waters, and especially the elevation differentiate regional climates. Some lowlands record mean maximum temperatures of 30°C (90°F) or above, while in the heavily populated highlands, mean maximum temperatures are 20°C–25°C (70°F–80°F). The highland capital of San Jose has a temperate rather than tropical climate. Costa Rica's wet season runs from May to November and the dry season from December to April, although the Caribbean plain receives heavy rainfall all year.

PEOPLE AND HISTORY

Unlike most of their Central American neighbors, Costa Ricans are overwhelmingly of European rather than mestizo descent. Although predominantly Spanish, there are also many Costa Ricans of German, Dutch, and Swiss origin. The indigenous Indian population numbers about 20,000—20% fewer than inhabited Costa Rica when the Spanish first settled in 1522. Blacks, descendants of 19th-century Jamaican immigrant workers, constitute a significant English-speaking minority of 30,000, concentrated around the Caribbean port of Puerto Limon.

In 1502, on his fourth and last voyage to the New World, Christopher Columbus made the first European landfall in the area that the Spanish named "Rich Coast." Costa Rica was settled in 1522 and administered for nearly three centuries as part of the Captaincy-General of Guatemala under a military governor. Finding no gold or other valuable minerals in their misnamed new home, but rather a resilient Indian nation fiercely resistant to Spanish attempts at exploitation, the Spanish turned to agriculture in their settlement.

The small landowners' egalitarian poverty, the population's ethnic and linguistic homogeneity, and Costa Rica's relative isolation from the Spanish colonial centers in Mexico and the Andean region contributed to the development of an autonomous and individualist agrarian society. After Costa Rica joined the other Central American provinces in a declaration of independence from Spain in 1821, the traditional isolation and poverty of the country lessened. The introduction of the coffee industry and banana cultivation in the 19th century created concentrated wealth. As some families accumulated fortunes, class differences began to emerge and became entrenched in the national character.

In 1823, the Central American Federation was dissolved, resulting in wars and power struggles throughout the region; Costa Rica's Guanacaste Province was annexed from Nicaragua in one such contest. The modern era of Costa Rican democracy began in 1889, in a change of political power that was remarkable considering the region's turbulent history and conditions.

The elections of 1899—the first free and honest ones in the nation's history—began a trend maintained with only a few lapses. In 1917, Federico Tinoco began a 30-month dictatorial rule; and in 1948, Jose Figueres Ferrer led a revolution in the wake of a disputed presidential election. Yet even this latter, dangerous event was resolved peacefully by the formation of a junta that ruled 18 months, long enough to draft a constitution guaranteeing its replacement by free elections. The original victor of the 1948 election was inaugurated a year later and served a full term.

Since that time, Costa Rica has held 10 presidential elections. Only twice, in 1974 and 1986, was the candidate of the party in power elected. The next elections are scheduled for 1990.

GOVERNMENT

Costa Rica is a democratic republic with a strong system of checks and balances. Executive power is vested in a president who, though somewhat more constrained than most Latin American heads of government, is indisputably the center of power. The president and 57 Legislative Assembly deputies are elected for 4-year terms. A constitutional amendment passed in 1969 prohibits multiple presidential or deputy terms.

The electoral process is supervised by the powerful Supreme Electoral Tribunal, a commission of three principal magistrates and six alternates selected by the Supreme Court of Justice. Judicial power is executed by the Supreme Court of Justice and legally established subsidiary courts, supervised by 17 magistrates selected for 8-year terms by the Legislative Assembly.

At the provincial level, power is exercised by presidentially appointed governors. There are no provincial legislatures. Autonomous state agencies enjoy substantial operational independence, including the nationalized commercial banks, state insurance monopoly, and the Social Security Agency.

(Courtesy Randolph Clarke)

Statue of Juan Santamaria, national hero of Costa Rica, Alajuela.

Principal Government Officials

President—Oscar Arias Sanchez
First Vice President—Jorge Manuel Dengo
Second Vice President—Victoria Garron

Ministers
Foreign Relations—Rodrigo Madrigal Nieto
Agriculture—Alberto Esquivel
Culture—Carlos Francisco Echeverria
Economy and Industry—Luis Diego Escalante
Education—Francisco Antonio Pacheco
Energy and Mines—Calixto Chaves
Finance—Fernando Naranjo
Foreign Commerce—Muni Figureres
Government and Police—Guido Fernandez
Health—Edgar Mohs
Housing and Urban Development—Fernando Zumbado
Justice—Luis Paulino Mora
Labor—Edwin Leon
Planning—Oton Solis
Presidency—Rodgrigo Arias
Public Security—Hernan Garron
Public Works and Transport—Guillermo Constenla
Science and Technology—Rodrigo Zeledon
President of Central Bank—Eduardo Lizano

Ambassador to the United States and the Organization of American States—(vacant)
Ambassador to the United Nations—(vacant)

Costa Rica maintains an embassy in the United States at 1825 Connecticut Avenue, NW., Suite 213, Washington, D.C. 20009 (tel. 202-234-2945).

POLITICAL CONDITIONS

Throughout its history, Costa Rica's political system has contrasted with that of its neighbors. The nation has steadily developed and maintained democratic institutions and an orderly, constitutional process of government succession. Several elements have influenced this advancement, among them educational opportunities, enlightened government leaders, comparative prosperity, flexible class lines, and the absence of a politically intrusive military.

The National Liberation Party (PLN) has been the leading political party in Costa Rica since the 1948 election. It is a social democratic party affiliated with the Socialist International. Administrations have swung from moderately conservative to moderately progressive as the PLN and various anti-PLN coalitions have tended to alternate control of the presidency. This pattern was broken in 1974 and 1986, when a PLN candidate succeeded a PLN incumbent.

Oscar Arias (PLN) won Costa Rica's presidential elections on February 2, 1986, defeating Social Christian Unity Party (PUSC) rival Rafael Angel Calderon by a seven percentage-point margin. Arias was helped at the polls by the popularity and accomplishments of his predecessor, President Luis Alberto Monge. The voters rewarded the PLN for Monge's success in stabilizing the economy after finding it in shambles from the Carazo administration. The PLN won 29 of 57 seats in the Legislative Assembly.

Having a communist regime in Nicaragua seriously affects Costa Rica's efforts to live in peace and develop economically. Costa Ricans fear the consolidation of a communist regime in Nicaragua and are concerned that Cubans, Soviets, and Eastern-bloc countries are arming and training a 60,000-man army. The Costa Ricans have no army. Nicaraguan troops frequently violate Costa Rican territory. The most serious incursion occurred May 31, 1985, when Nicaraguan soldiers operating in Costa Rica ambushed a Costa Rican Civil Guard border patrol, killing 2 guardsmen and injuring 11 others. The Nicaraguan problem discourages new investment and tourism and stimulates capital flight by the Costa Rican private sector. Costa Rica's approximately 200,000 official and unofficial refugees from Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Guatemala are a heavy burden on the country's educational and health facilities.

ECONOMY

Although traditionally one of the strongest nations in the region, economically as well as politically, Costa Rica faces severe challenges to its economic stability.

Increases in government spending in the late 1970s and higher world prices for coffee and other important Costa Rican exports stimulated the economy, creating inflationary pressure. When coffee prices declined sharply in 1978, and petroleum import costs doubled the next year, Costa Rica's balance-of-payments deficit soared. Real gross domestic product (GDP) growth fell from 8.9% in 1977 to -8.8% in 1982. Positive growth rates resumed in 1983 and continued in 1984 and 1985.

The Costa Rican Government is pursuing a course of disciplined management, in consultation with the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, to bring expenditures into line with available resources and to reduce internal and external debt. The United States is providing carefully targeted assistance and economic advice to aid Costa Rica's recovery.

Costa Rica is continuing its efforts to industrialize and shift labor to more productive and profitable activities. These efforts provide opportunities for continued U.S. exports and joint ventures. Light industry, tourism, and some agribusiness investment opportunities offer inviting returns for entrepreneurs and promise increased prosperity for Costa Ricans.

DEFENSE

Costa Rica's 1949 constitution abolished the army. The country relies on a 4,500-member Civil Guard and a 3,500-member Rural Guard to maintain internal security and public order, as well as emergency external defense, and on the OAS and the Rio treaty to guarantee the inviolability of its borders.

The lines of authority and responsibility for police and security functions are diffused. The President of the Republic is the commander in chief of the Public Security Forces. The primary organization is the Civil Guard, which is under the Ministry of Public Security. It is essentially a constabulary force responsible for law and order in urban areas, and for land, air, and maritime border surveillance. The secondary organization is the Rural Guard, which is under the Ministry of Government. It is responsible for performing police functions in rural areas throughout Costa Rica's seven provinces.

FOREIGN RELATIONS

Costa Rica is an outspoken and active member of the international community. It lobbied strenuously for the establishment of a UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and was the first nation

to recognize the jurisdiction of the Inter-American Human Rights Court, now based in San Jose. It also has expressed a firm commitment to the letter and spirit of the Rio treaty.

Since 1979, Costa Rica's relations with its Central American neighbors, and its foreign policy in general, have been dominated by problems with Nicaragua. Costa Rica has strongly supported the Contadora initiative and has worked with El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala to develop a meaningful treaty. In 1985, President Monge launched an initiative for revitalizing the economies of the Central American democracies that includes proposals for reducing existing restrictions on interregional commercial transactions and payments and a common policy related to trade in basic commodities.

Costa Rica has diplomatic relations with the U.S.S.R. but broke relations with Cuba in May 1981 to protest Cuban support of leftist subversion in Central America.

U.S.-COSTA RICAN RELATIONS

The cordial relationship between Washington and San Jose is based on mutual respect for democratic traditions, common goals, and a relationship free from serious political disagreement. U.S. and Costa Rican views on foreign policy are not always identical. Costa Rica aligned itself with other countries of Latin America against U.S. policies during the Falklands-Malvinas war in 1982 and in voting for UN censure of the United States over U.S. military operations in Grenada in 1983. It shares with the United States an interest in, and has played an important role in, promoting democracy in Central America, including Nicaragua.

Further Information

These titles are provided as a general indication of material published on this country. The Department of State does not endorse unofficial publications.

Ameringer, Charles. *Don Pepe: A Political Biography of Jose Figueres of Costa Rica.* Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1978.

Bell, John Patrick. *Crisis in Costa Rica.* University of Texas Press, 1971.

Biesanz, John and Mavis. *Costa Rican Life.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1944.

Denton, Charles F. *Patterns of Costa Rican Politics.* Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1971.

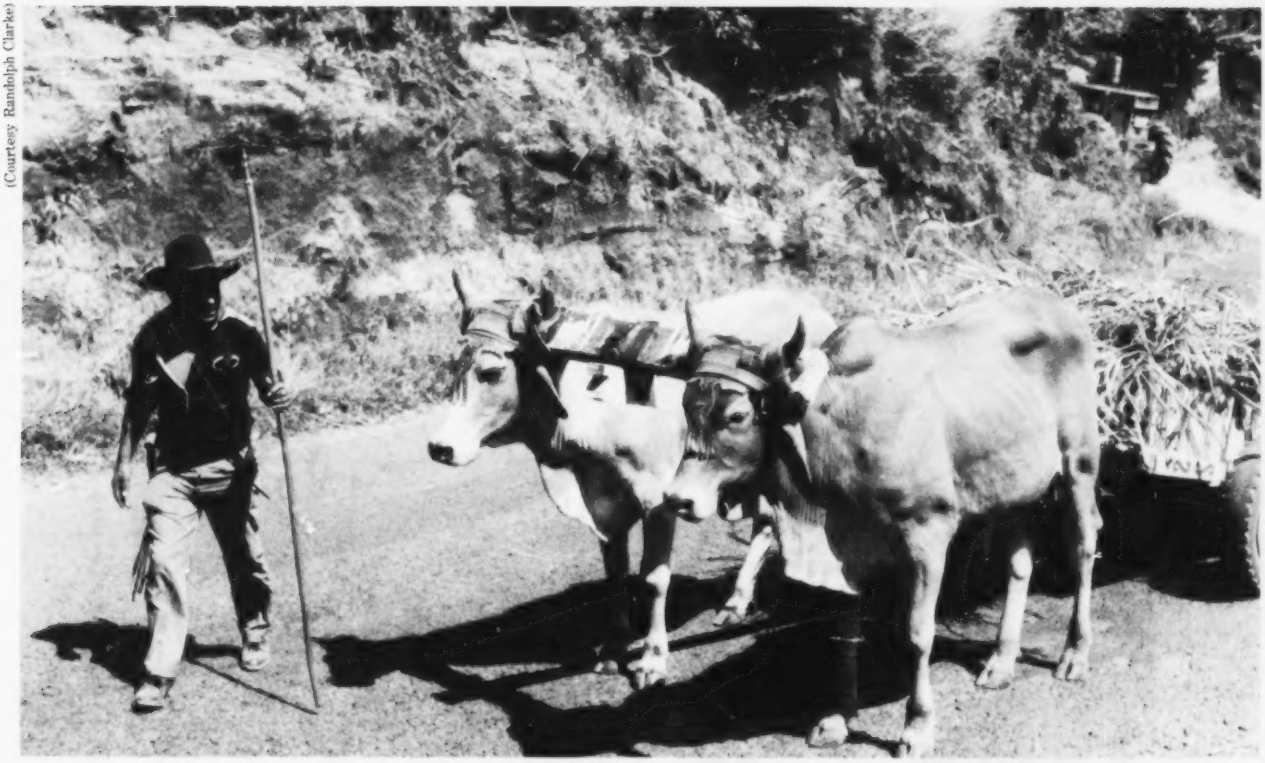
Available from the Superintendent of Documents, US Government Printing Office, 20402:

American University. *Area Handbook for Costa Rica,* 1984.

For information on foreign economic trends, commercial development, production, trade regulations, and tarriff rates, contact the International Trade Administration, US Department of Commerce, Washington, DC 20230 or any Commerce Department district office.

Hauling sugarcane on the road to Poas Volcano National Park.

(Courtesy Randolph Clarke)



(Courtesy Jan K. Herman)

Black howler monkey, Tamarindo Estuary in Guana Caste.

Travel Notes

Climate and clothing: San Jose, at an altitude of 1,158 m. (3,800 ft.), has an average temperature of 24°C (75°F). Its rainy season is May–November; however, rainfall is heavier throughout the year on the Caribbean side. Spring-weight clothing, with a sweater for cool evenings and trips to the mountains, and umbrellas are recommended.

Customs: US citizens arriving by air need a tourist card (issued by airline offices) and proof of US citizenship or a passport with a Costa Rican visa, onward passage, and sufficient funds for their stay. Overland travelers should carry a US passport and visas for those countries they will enter. No vaccinations are required.

Health: Medical services are good for most purposes. Essential medicines are available. The most serious health hazards—diarrhea, amoebic dysentery, malaria, and typhoid—occur more frequently outside the capital. Drinking water in major San Jose hotels and restaurants is purified; outside the capital, water should be boiled.

Telecommunications: An automatic telephone service covers all of Costa Rica. Direct-dial service to the US is available. Compania Radiografica handles international telegrams. San Jose is 1 hr. behind eastern standard time.

Transportation: Principal cities are connected by highway, air, or rail with San Jose. Eastern Airlines and LACSA, the national airline, have daily flights to several US cities, and San Jose has air connections to other Central American and Caribbean capitals. Within San Jose, taxis are efficient, but fares should be agreed upon in advance. Buses connect all parts of the city and nearby suburbs.

Tourist attractions: Travel agencies conduct guided tours to the major attractions—the Irazu and Poas volcanoes, the Sarchi Oxcart Factory, where gaily painted oxcarts are for sale, the Atlantic Zone jungle, and Pacific beaches. Within San Jose, the National Theater and the National Museum are major points of interest.

The United States has responded to Costa Rica's economic plight through developmental assistance and humanitarian aid. The Peace Corps program, with 198 volunteers, has helped in the transfer of skills in agriculture, education, health, nutrition, and natural resources development. The U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) works not only to support Costa Rican efforts to strengthen critical sectors in the short term but also to help broaden and accelerate agriculture and industrial modernization and growth. Low income farmers are being helped toward self-sufficiency, and the urban poor are aided by industrial development, family planning, and educational programs.

Many other U.S. agencies, including the U.S. Information Service and the Department of Agriculture, are active in Costa Rica. About 15,000 American private citizens, mostly retirees, live in Costa Rica.

Principal U.S. Officials

Ambassasor—Lewis A. Tambs
Deputy Chief of Mission—James L. Tull
Director, AID Mission—Daniel A. Chaij
Public Affairs Officer (USIS)—Diane Stanley
Economic Counselor—Bonnie M. Lincoln
Political Counselor—Joseph F. Becelia

The U.S. Embassy in Costa Rica is located at Calle 1, Avenida 3, San Jose (tel. 33-11-55).

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